

Holy Thursday: The Institution of the Eucharist and of the Priesthood

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

We will meditate tomorrow upon the two great mysteries which this holy day recalls to our memory; that is to say: first, the institution of the Eucharist; second, the institution of the priesthood. We will then make the resolution: first, to make the best communion of the year tomorrow; second, to pass the whole of the day in a great feeling of gratitude towards Jesus Christ for the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of a holy Abbot: "*O God! prodigal of Thyself through love for us*" (Guerric, Abbot, *in Fest. Pent.*).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us transport ourselves in spirit to the Last Supper, where Jesus Christ, on the eve of His death, assembled His apostles together, like the good father of a family who, being near his end, assembles his children round his death-bed in order to address to them his last farewells, to inform them of his last wishes, and to leave them the legacy which his love has provided for them. It is then, above all, that he testifies to them how much he has loved them (John XIII:1). Let us assist with resolution and love at this touching spectacle, and let us meditate on the two great mysteries of the day, the institution of the Eucharist and the institution of the priesthood.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE EUCHARIST

Let us first admire Jesus Christ on His knees before His apostles and washing their feet, in order to show to all coming ages what profound humility and what perfect charity are required by the sacrament which He is about to institute and they to receive. Then He places Himself at the supper-table, takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and distributes it among His apostles, saying to them, "*Take ye and eat, this is My body*" Then, in the same way, He takes the cup, and gives it to them, saying, "*Drink ye all of this, for this is My blood of the New Testament which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins*" (Matt. XXVI:26–28). Oh, who can help recognising in all this the love of Jesus Christ! The divine Saviour on the eve of quitting us cannot bear to be separated from us; I will not leave you orphans (John XIV:18), He had said; My Father recalls Me, but in going back to Him I shall not be separated from you. My death is fixed in the eternal decrees, but in dying I shall know how to survive Myself in order to remain with you. My wisdom has found the means, My love is about to carry them into execution. In consequence, He changes the bread into His body, the wine into His blood; and in virtue of the inseparable union of the soul with the body and the blood, in virtue of the indissoluble unity of the divine Person with human nature, what was formerly only bread and wine is now the adorable Person of Jesus Christ, whole and entire, His sacred Person, as great, as powerful as it is at the right hand of the Father, governing the whole universe, adored by the angels who tremble in His presence (Preface of the Mass). This miracle is followed by another. What I have just done, Jesus Christ says, you, My apostles, will also do; I give to you the power, and not only to you, but to all your successors down to the end of time, because the Eucharist, being the soul of religion and its essence, ought to last as long as it itself will

last. Such is the rich inheritance which Jesus Christ has provided for His children throughout the course of ages; such is the testament which this good father of a family at the moment of His departure has made in favour of His children; His dying hands have written it and signed it with His blood; such is the benediction which this good Jacob gave to His sons assembled around Him before leaving them. O precious inheritance! Dear and amiable testament! rich benediction! My God! my God! how shall I thank Thee enough for so much love?

INSTITUTION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

It seemed, Lord, as though Thou hadst exhausted all the riches of Thy love towards us, and yet behold, a fresh marvel is revealed. It is no longer only the Eucharist which is given us on this holy day; it is the priesthood with all the sacraments, with the holy Church, with an infallible authority to teach us, power to govern, grace to bless, wisdom to direct. For all that is essentially connected with the Eucharist, either as a preparation disposing the soul to receive it, or as a consequence to preserve and develop the fruits of it. Consequently, Jesus Christ, as the Sovereign Pontiff, was able to bestow, and really did bestow all these powers, by the single word: Do this. O priesthood, which dost enlighten, purify, and inflame the souls of men, which dost dispense on earth the mysteries of God and the riches of grace; priesthood, which, helpful to the soul which has fallen as well as to the just, makest repentance to be felt and openest to us heaven, which dost gather together sinners and dost give them back their innocence; priesthood, which dost sustain the wavering soul and enablest it to make progress in virtue; which dost protect the world against itself and against corruption; against Heaven and its vengeance; priesthood, ineffable benefit, I bless thee, and I bless God for having given thee to the world. Alas! what would the world be without thee, without thee who art its sun, its light, and its heat, its consolation, its strength, and its support? O holy Thursday! thrice blessed day, which has procured so much happiness for the children of Adam, never can we celebrate you with enough piety, fervour, and love.

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.